

Tuberculosis and Health

Written by Mike Honda
Tuesday, 13 April 2010 09:44

With the passage of the [Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#) last month, Congress helped increase access to health care for 45 million uninsured Americans. This increased access, along with a new focus on preventive care, will help make all residents of our country healthier, and will make it easier for people to address health concerns as they arise.

The debate about this bill inspired many doctors, public health experts, and scientists to take a closer look at the public health threats facing our nation. Though the healthcare reform bill takes huge strides forward to improve Americans' overall health, there are many public health challenges that we must continue to address through targeted efforts. One of these challenges is our high level of tuberculosis (TB) infection, and the racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in the TB infection rates.

12,904 cases of tuberculosis (4.2 cases per 100,000 persons) were reported in the United States in 2008. While that number may not seem incredibly high, the picture changes when we look at the infection rate for communities of color. Native Hawaiians contract the disease at a rate of 15.9 cases per 100,000, and Asian Americans contract it at a rate of 25.6 cases per 100,000, more than five times the rate of the general population.

Despite its prevalence, many people are unaware of the causes of or the risks associated with tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a disease caused by germs that are spread from person-to-person through the air. The most common signs of the disease are coughing and chest pain, but symptoms can vary greatly if TB spreads from the lungs to other organs. The disease causes 1.8 million deaths per year worldwide, and is the world's greatest killer of women of reproductive age and of persons with HIV/AIDS. In the United States, tuberculosis caused 644 deaths in 2006, and many more hospitalizations.

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As Chair of the [Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus](#) , I am particularly aware of the dramatic disparity in TB infection rates, and have worked with many of my colleagues at the local, state, and federal level to take steps to combat this disease. Over the last few years, I have worked to make sure that efforts to counter diseases like tuberculosis remained a priority for our federal government. As a Member of the [Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, Health, Human Services, and Education](#) , I have repeatedly fought to ensure continued funding for the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis. I have also co-sponsored several TB-related bills, including the [Comprehensive TB Elimination Act](#) , and the [TB Now Act](#) .

I am pleased that the Tuberculosis Partnership of Santa Clara County, along with many other organizations throughout the Bay Area and the rest of the country, are working to eliminate this devastating illness. Last month, I was honored to receive a commendation for my efforts in Congress to address this disease. I look forward to a time when TB is no longer a threat to Americans.